

VZCZCXRO4528
RR RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV
DE RUEHBW #1187/01 3240908
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 190908Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0644
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNS/NSC WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BELGRADE 001187

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: SERBIA: SOCIALIST MINISTER'S CHANGES AT INTERIOR

REF: BELGRADE 718

Classified By: Acting Political Chief Bradford Bell for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Four months after the formation of the new Serbian government, First Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister, and Socialist Party head Ivica Dacic has made controversial changes at the Interior Ministry. While some claim that Dacic is surrounding himself with Milosevic-era cronies who will only perpetuate problems at Interior, others say his personnel changes are addressing badly needed reform. Whatever his motives, Dacic is facing serious challenges at Interior, as evidenced by a well-publicized walk-out of overworked riot police in Belgrade. Though many of Dacic's appointments may be a form of political patronage, we expect at a minimum that he will consider, as a member of a pro-European coalition government, the need to meet international standards as he undertakes any further reorganization of Interior. End Summary.

Dacic's Reorganizations at Interior

¶2. (U) Socialist Party (SPS) head and Interior Minister Ivica Dacic recently began appointing officials to senior policy and operational positions at the Interior Ministry (MOI), which is still largely filled with appointees from former Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) Interior Minister Dragan Jovic. In October, Dacic appointed Deputy Police Director Branislav Mitrovic, MOI Cabinet Chief Branko Lazarevic, Public Relations Head Suzana Vasilijevic, Combating Organized Crime Unit Head Svetislav Djurovic, Border Police Head Nenad Banovic, and State Secretary Dragan Markovic. (Note: We have heard that Dacic argued with the Democratic Party (DS) over the appointment of Markovic, who was a compromise between DS's preferred candidate and Dacic's.) He is also replacing some local police chiefs.

¶3. (S/NF) Long-term MOI officials complain that Dacic intends to fill all key positions with Milosevic-era party cronies and is isolating professional police, such as Police Director Milorad Veljovic. A police officer with access to Dacic and his chief of staff told us that Dacic was allowing high-level SPS official Veljko Odalovic to appoint inexperienced, Milosevic-era individuals to key positions and that Dacic was using those individuals to circumvent Veljovic. The officer believed Dacic would ultimately remove the well-respected police chief. Customs Director Predrag Petronijevic expressed similar concerns to the DCM. Petronijevic said he thought Dacic had staged an October 24 walk-out by Belgrade's riot police as a pretext to clean house and install his own people. Petronijevic pointed out that the new heads of Organized Crime and the Border Police were ex-military, not

police. Belgrade University Security Studies professor Zoran Dragisic was also concerned about some of Dacic's personnel choices but said he thought that the DS would insist on making some appointments and could protect Veljovic if President Tadic chose. (Note: Dragisic unsuccessfully interviewed for the position of International Cooperation Head at the MOI.)

Another View of Dacic

¶4. (S) Not all observers take such a dim view of Dacic's work at Interior. Head of OSCE's Law Enforcement Strategic Development Unit in Belgrade, Amadeo Watkins, said he had also heard rumors that Dacic was working around Veljovic but thought it was untrue that Dacic was trying to set Veljovic up. Watkins pointed out that Jovic had not empowered Veljovic either but that Dacic nevertheless most likely saw Veljovic as Jovic's man. Watkins saw Dacic's new appointments as positive, because the Interior cabinet and police directorate heads left over from the Jovic era were opposed to badly needed reform in the ministry. Watkins praised recent appointments, such as Lazarevic and Vasilijevic, although he voiced concern that some of Dacic's advisors were not law enforcement experts. On the other hand, some uniformed police tell us that, while they are concerned that some of the new police chiefs are inexperienced, they are happy Dacic is promoting from within and they are assisting the new chiefs in learning the job.

Dacic Defends Appointments

BELGRADE 00001187 002 OF 003

¶5. (SBU) Dacic staunchly defended his staff choices in a November 3 meeting with the DCM. When we asked Dacic directly about Milosevic-era personnel among his staff and advisors, he retorted that he had been in the Milosevic government himself. He said he had appointed people he trusted and that none of his recent appointments, such as Mitrovic, had served in high-level positions under Milosevic.

He noted that most law enforcement professionals at a certain level had served under Milosevic; even the respected Veljovic had been Nis police chief at that time.

Reforms Needed at Interior

¶6. (SBU) Regardless of the motives for his personnel choices, Dacic faces challenges at Interior, as the riot police walk-out highlighted. The night of October 24-25, the Belgrade Brigade, which is responsible for crowd control, refused to report for duty, citing months of uncompensated overtime and exhaustion. The Belgrade Brigade had been working 18-hour days since late July when daily demonstrations in downtown Belgrade began to protest the July 27 arrest of war crimes defendant Radovan Karadzic (reftel). Dragisic told us that police salaries were so low that Interior could not recruit Belgrade residents to fill posts in the capital. In an October 30 interview with news magazine Vreme, Veljovic blamed the police protest on a shortage of 14,000 police. Veljovic pledged to address the issue but said police would continue to be overworked if the Finance Ministry did not authorize new positions. Interior International Cooperation Head Drazen Maravic told us privately that the shortage affected every police unit.

¶7. (C) The Interior Ministry requires more than just additional personnel to overcome the legacy of mismanagement by the Milosevic regime and later DSS control. OSCE's Watkins said that Dacic's first task at Interior needed to be strategic planning. Watkins said Serbia was probably not lacking 14,000 police but that the Ministry would have no way of knowing that without a needs assessment. Watkins emphasized that improved management and human resources

procedures were needed in order to better use existing personnel, who could then be paid better with any future budget increase. Watkins said the key priorities were to simplify Interior,s complicated, stove-piped bureaucratic structure and get rid of Jovic appointees in key positions. Changes in the uniformed police would then follow, according to Watkins. Professor Dragisic said there were other challenges for Interior, such as reversing a militarization of the police from the Milosevic era, depoliticizing the once professional gendarmerie, integrating the Border Police into Interior, and decentralizing control of individual police units. Dragisic said Interior had long been politicized, with local police chiefs working for their party, which demoralized professionals and obliterated citizens' confidence in the police.

Will Dacic Change Interior for the Better?

18. (C) While observers differ as to Dacic's progress thus far, most agree that Dacic will probably try to reform the ministry. Watkins told us he was optimistic Dacic had the right vision for reforming Interior, because it was in the political interest of Dacic, as the leader of a small party with wavering popularity in the ruling coalition, to perform well. Professor Dragisic emphasized that reforming Interior would also allow Dacic to portray himself as a reformer. Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights director Biljana Kovacevic-Vuco told us that Dacic would only carry out reform if President Boris Tadic (DS) insisted upon it. Dacic himself touted Interior's accomplishments and repeated the government's pro-European priorities in an October 31 press conference celebrating the government's first 100 days in office. Privately, Dacic told us that he intended to look for ways to capitalize on international police training, improve regional cooperation on combating corruption, and improve the Ministry,s technology and equipment.

Comment

19. (C) Though observations about Dacic,s intentions and his new personnel appointments run to extremes, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Many rumors against Dacic are probably spurred by political jockeying. Whatever his motivations, a strong desire to remain a part of the ruling coalition will probably keep Dacic -- who knows that his

BELGRADE 00001187 003 OF 003

party would not fair well in new elections -- in check. The Embassy continues to have an open channel to Dacic, through which we will continue to insist on police professionalism, rule of law, and accountability. End Comment.
MUNTER